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ABSTRACT

Intended for preservice teachers, this paper offers an 8-item outline and specific instructions for preparing effective teaching portfolios. The paper also includes a response guide for field reviewers and selected student teacher responses to the portfolio process questions, interspersed with comments and excerpts from the author's teaching journal. (CR)

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"What Should My Voice Be Like?" Helping Preservice Teachers Develop Teaching Portfolios

National Council of Teachers of English Spring Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Thursday, March 19, 1998

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Mary H. Sawyer, SUNY at New Paltz
NCTE Spring 1998: Portfolios in Teacher Education

The Teaching Portfolio Assignment

The portfolio should be a reflection of yourself as a teacher and learner. Effective portfolios contain a reflective narrative that runs about 8-10 double-spaced pages in length. This narrative is documented by artifacts that are placed in the appendix. This narrative can also be broken up to introduce various sections of your portfolio (e.g., Resume, Preparation, Teaching, Evaluations) and their artifacts. The portfolio should look professional and be well packaged (typed, in a binder/folder. A 3-ring binder works well.)

1. **Cover Letter** (not considered part of your portfolio, but it is conceivably the most important document in your job application packet)

2. **A "Dear Reader" letter or introductory paragraph that provides a "road map," sets the tone, and introduces the portfolio.**

3. **Table of Contents**

4. **Updated Resume and List of References--with phone numbers (1-2 pages, typed)**

5. **Academic Preparation (1 page or less).**
(This section can also be integrated into a reflective narrative on your teaching. See Item 6 below.) Discuss critical English, education, or other courses you have taken as well as any specializations (e.g., contemporary American literature, feminist thought, drama, journalism). Discuss special training or related job experience (e.g., coaching, RA, counseling).

6. **Reflective Narrative on Your Teaching (8-10 pages total).** *This part of your portfolio can also be broken up into sections that introduce portfolio artifacts (e.g., unit plans, handouts, student work, evaluations of your teaching).* Below are some topics you **might** address.

   Your Philosophy on the Teaching of Language, Literature, and Writing.
   You **may** want to discuss: (a) *Where you are*--Discuss where you stand on such issues as the teaching of grammar, the canon/multicultural literature, authentic assessment, cooperative/collaborative learning, media literacy (TV, MTV, films), English teaching and "inclusion," diversity, technology, art, drama, interdisciplinary curricula, etc. Discuss those issues that have your special interest or those that have personal significance; (b) *Where you're headed*--Professional development activities, conferences, workshops

attended, curricular revisions, experiments tried in class, short- and long-range teaching goals

Your Teaching Experience and Growth

You **may** want to: (a) Briefly discuss your assigned student teaching responsibilities (grade levels, number of students, length of time in placement, length of time in full charge, and any unique features of your placement), (b) Discuss your growth as a teacher based on your own observations and/or evaluations from cooperating teacher, supervisor, and/or students. You may also choose to discuss your growth in terms of pivotal events or experiences. (Excerpts from your journals and/or evaluations should be placed in the appendix.)

Your Teaching Methods and Strategies

Discuss how you enact your philosophy through your teaching. You **might** discuss specific units and the resulting student products. You may want to discuss how your teaching exemplifies New York's new Learning Standards. (Include the specific plans and students' work samples in the appendix.) You also might put in photos of bulletin boards you created, student dramatic productions, etc. *If you chose to include work samples or photos videos of students at work in your class, make sure you have their written permission and remove their names from their work so they may remain anonymous.*

7. **Analysis of Others' Evaluations of Your Teaching (1-2 pages)**
Analyze others' evaluations of your teaching (e.g., your students', supervisor, cooperating teachers). The evaluations themselves should be in the appendix). *See attached page for samples of student evaluation forms.*

8. **Appendix**

Evaluation: Your supervisor will respond to your portfolio. *In addition, you may opt to have practitioners in the field (e.g., English Dept. Chairpersons) respond to your portfolios. (See below "Response Guide").*

Teaching Portfolio: Response Guide for Field-Reviewers

Portfolio Author: [redacted]

Reviewer's Name: [redacted]

Reviewer's District and Position: [redacted] High School/English Teacher, Cabinet Member

Appearance (Is the portfolio professional looking? Is it well organized?)

Reviewer's Comments & Suggestions:

Resume: You might elaborate on skills and special talents you possess and how you use them.

Resume: Include a table of contents.

Resume: Perhaps you could add a successful lesson - the plan and examples of the results.

Cogency (Why would I want to hire this person? Why might I think twice about hiring this person?)

Reviewer's Comments & Suggestions

Your enthusiasm comes through - I like that. I enjoyed your students' evaluations. I would suggest that you should clearly identify their grade and level of ability. Also, include some examples for each teaching experience.

The only thing you lack is experience. Do some substitute work in local districts. It gives you experience and makes you a known quality.

Other Comments & Suggestions?

For every person hired as a new teacher, there are over one hundred applicants. You need to highlight those skills or qualities which give you an edge.

A well thought out and comprehensive portfolio is a big advantage, especially in an interview. Be sure to include examples of successful lessons and student work. Most likely, you will be interviewed by a committee of people: students, parents, teachers, support staff and administrators - so be prepared. The days of only one or two people interviewing an applicant appear to be on the way out. Perhaps this is something to discuss and practice in your seminar course. Interviewing before several or more people is definitely a unique experience. I also recommend that you become familiar with various types of authentic assessment - i.e., portfolios performance assessments, mastery learning, rubric, etc.

My last recommendation is to make yourself as valuable as possible. As money becomes tighter and districts look to find ways to save, having multiple qualifications makes a candidate more attractive. English/Social Studies, English/Special Education, etc., are viable alternatives that districts like. Keep that in mind when thinking of your master's degree work.

Finally, think, act and look professional at all times. The sooner it becomes automatic, the more likely you are to secure a teaching position.

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"What Should My Voice Be Like?"

Tensions in the Process of Helping Preservice Teachers Develop Teaching Portfolios

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1. Purpose: Supporting Professional Development or Creating a Public Relations Document?

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2. Process: iterative and integrated with Instruction or individualistic and separate from instruction?

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3. Evaluation: Improving Preservice Teachers' Portfolios or Allowing the Portfolio to be an Honest Reflection of the Preservice Teachers' Strengths & Weaknesses?

"What Should My Voice Be Like?"

The Tensions in the Process of Helping Preservice Teachers Develop Teaching Portfolios

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Teaching Portfolios as Vehicles for:

- Reflection on one's teaching
- Job interview preparation/Employment
- Developing one's political voice
- Developing Relationships and Increasing communication with the Secondary Schools
- Increasing the Visibility of the SUNY-New Paltz Teacher Education Program

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"The portfolio you create in this seminar may be more "honest" than the one you would give to a potential employer. For example, you should discuss your weaknesses and growth candidly for this student/learning portfolio, but you will probably want to "sell" yourself more (emphasize your strengths) in the portfolio you give to a potential employer"

Teaching Portfolio Assignment (as developed by Mary Sawyer, Fall 1995)

"My students wish to emphasize that these are drafts, not finished products. You are free to write your comments directly on their portfolio papers. I do not recommend correcting systematic grammatical/usage errors or 'fixing' the portfolio; the final portfolio should accurately reflect its author and his/her facility with language. Weak portfolios can simply be noted as such."

(Excerpt from Sawyer's letter to External Reviewers, Fall 1996)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

1. Discuss how the process of creating the portfolio may have contributed to your own professional development.

REFLECTION

"It primarily helped me organize my thoughts and to 'find out' what I think--very good for self-reflection." (Joseph)

"Creating a portfolio forced me to recognize patterns in my teaching performance. This did help me to 'tighten up' my lessons and make them more interesting." (Paul)

"The portfolio contributed to my professional development by making me examine how I want others to perceive my ideas on teaching as much as making me reflect on what I actually feel. (Basically being able to communicate why I do what I do.)" (Anna)

"In terms of professional development, the portfolio helps me keep sight of my focuses and beliefs about teaching." (George)

"It forced me to reflect on my shortcomings and determine how I should change." (Judy)

"It grounded me in my philosophy and helped me better articulate my teaching." (Michele)

February 25, 1998: Maybe the portfolio really is a good tool for reflection and not just a public relations document. Remember that no one in his/her right mind would create a portfolio unless it were somehow required--so there is no way of getting rid of the high-stakes context that might push to compromise a portfolio's "authenticity." After talking with student teachers and reading their comments, I see that they have used the portfolio process to help them better understand and articulate their teaching experiences and their beliefs. They have made some sense of the experience and feel better prepared for interviews.

(Excerpt from Mary Sawyer's Teaching Journal)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

2. Discuss how the process of creating the portfolio may have detracted from your own professional development or classroom instruction.

TIME CONSUMING

"*Anything* that takes time from planning lessons or grading papers detracts!" (Judy)

"I was very nervous about finishing it and spent the last three weekends of teaching devoted solely to writing the portfolio. I would work so long on the portfolio that I'd end up staying up late and not eating-- making for a shaky teacher the next day." (Alice)

"It simply added to an already overwhelming work load--it was frustrating trying to find time to work on it." (Joseph)

"Creating the portfolio during student teaching added an amount of undue stress. I feel the portfolio is a positive thing but too much to do with student teaching." (Anna)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

3. Do you think the portfolio is an honest reflection of yourself and your teaching?

HONEST

"It is a reflection of how I feel at this level of inexperience. It is difficult to state a philosophy when it changes every second!! It is thought, how I feel now." (Anna)

"I feel the portfolio is an honest reflection of my first experiences as a teacher. I do not think the information in my portfolio will be an accurate depiction of the instructor I plan to be in ten years. These are new experiences which are done on a trial and error basis. So far, it's a constant process of learning." (Paul)

"Absolutely, it is a true reflection, for now! I know it will change." (Jennifer)

"My portfolio is absolutely a reflection of my optimistic personality, ideas, and strategies (teaching)." (Evelyn)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

3. Do you think the portfolio is an honest reflection of yourself and your teaching?

HONEST, BUT . . .

THE LIMITS OF A PAPER REPRESENTATION

"I feel the portfolio is one aspect--a more intellectual aspect of how I am as a teacher." (Joseph)

"Mostly. I don't think it can reflect student-teacher interaction as well as it can reflect lesson planning skills and academic preparation." (Carol)

THE FOCUS ON STRENGTHS

"Sometimes being realistic doesn't get you a job. For example, you don't mention that you don't reach every student."(John)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

3. Do you think the portfolio is an honest reflection of yourself and your teaching?

HONEST, BUT . . .

THE CRAFTING OF "SELF"

"I wanted to write a lot of things about philosophy--things I knew they were going to be looking for in an interview. So, . . .like I would in a cover letter, [I asked], 'How can I put my best foot forward?' . . . Of course, I wanted to tone down certain things. . . . For example, a superintendent encouraged me to put all my course work down, and I have a lot of feminist course work, and I was concerned that that would be read in a certain way: 'She's too radical. Don't hire her.' But I decided that that was a part of me that I can't compromise too much, and that I wouldn't be happy in a district that wouldn't view [my feminist course work] as a strength."

(Interview with Michele, December, 1997)

"My portfolio was toned down a lot. For example, I was angry at the way completely unacceptable student behavior was not being confronted in the school where I did my student teaching, but I was told to "get that out of there" because it sounded 'too angry.' You have to be diplomatic and politically correct so you don't rock the boat. You can't have too strong of views because you don't know what kind of school you will be interviewing for--maybe it will be another school that does not confront discipline problems. You've got to play it safe."

(Interview with Glenda, March 1998)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

4. How could the portfolio assignment and the process of sharing of portfolios drafts with peers be improved?

MORE TIME FOR SHARING AND FEEDBACK

"Allowing more time for sharing and evaluating portfolios. Perhaps, student teaching could be shortened or a week allowed at the end of student teaching devoted entirely to the creation of a portfolio. Feedback from peers and teachers is a wonderful way for portfolios to be improved, changed." (Evelyn)

"Start portfolio during methods semester [the semester prior to student teaching]. The process seems so rushed during student teaching." (George)

Selected Student Teacher Responses to Sawyer's Portfolio Process Questions (all names are pseudonyms)

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR AND COOPERATING TEACHER FEEDBACK

5. Did you share your portfolio drafts with your cooperating teacher, supervisors, or other administrators or teachers?

"I did briefly, but I didn't get tons of feedback. If I had more time to share, it would be nice." (George)

"Yes, I did share my portfolio with other teachers at the school I am currently student teaching in. It was wonderful to receive feedback from people who possess various ideas and views. I picked up some excellent tips in improving my portfolio. Everyone was helpful and enthusiastic." (Evelyn)

"I shared it with my cooperating teacher. She thought it was impressive but wondered about its ability to help me find a job." (Joseph)

"So far, I've shared my portfolio with my cooperating teacher. She reacted very positively and suggested I add photos of students, bulletin boards, and myself." (Carol)

"Yes. Mr. Wilson went over it with a fine-tooth comb." (Alice)